

THE LABOUR ORGANISER

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Topics of the Month

ROTHERHAM. What a thrill of jubilation that word has sent through the ranks. We should like the Prime Minister or

any other of the Labour deserters to test their seats just now. For Rotherham is no early swallow nor yet a victory gained on points; no chance "lesson" which supporters sometimes allow themselves to give the Government of their choice at a by-election; it is not even a second-thoughts-are-best result. It means one thing and one only; a deep-seated, far-reaching revolt against "National" Government and the policies of capitalism. It is the harbinger of change.

Undoubtedly it is coming — that awakening of the British people. What a mess the nations of the world are in. Is the awakening too late, or will the deluge come too soon, sweeping Labour to power at the next election without a real mandate for our purpose? The pendulum swung back at Rotherham. But the swing of the pendulum mustn't take the place of Socialist progress and Socialist education. That, indeed, is the lesson we draw from this election. It is coming, and on the rising tide (to change the metaphor) we are going to find conviction easier and propaganda more productive. If Rotherham means business, if the people think like Rotherham, then not only rebels but rebel workers and members will be easier to obtain. If the swing over is genuine and purposeful there must be a big proportion who will go further than mere voting. Once again then, *now* is the time to reap. Let us recruit the ranks. Rotherham beckons on. Forward, comrades, forward!

Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad. This poignant truth has a significance to-day to many

matters; to capitalism, perhaps to Western civilisation itself, certainly to the present Government. With failure written large upon their every action at home and abroad, with a rising resentment in their own ranks, and an advancing tide of working-class indignation everywhere, the Government must now needs arouse the formidable antagonism and active opposition of the great Co-operative Movement. Thanks be to them for attacking where their action can do nothing but bring into the field against them large new forces and reserves. Despite the growing political powers and activities of the Co-operative Movement, the great body of the Movement has never been aroused to political consciousness. History appears to be repeating itself. What the Taff Vale judgment did to prick the Trade Unions into action the new taxation of Co-operative profits will do for the Co-operative Movement. It behoves all our readers to be alive to the new opportunity; to reiterate and emphasise Labour's record in this matter; its long-standing and natural alliance with the Co-operative Movement; and to take all steps necessary to stand by and defend our allies against this new attack. If the Government insist, only a Labour victory at the next election will restore justice to co-operators; and this fact implies many possibilities.

With the end of the first quarter of the year in sight it is appropriate that each Party should now review its progress in membership development during 1933. We are afraid that some local Parties have just forgotten that there is a membership campaign on and have ceased making any consistent effort to obtain new members. Shame on these slackers! We earnestly hope readers of the *Labour Organiser* will determine to put this matter again before the next meeting, and will secure that some definite

steps are again taken to recruit members. It is wonderful what consistent and organised efforts can accomplish; even small efforts (say the selection of a few names at each ward meeting to be definitely visited and invited to join by the next meeting) can accomplish great things. Unless your Party membership is growing, there is slackness somewhere; someone, perhaps the whole local Party, is failing in its duty at what is now the most critical hour in the life of working-class movements throughout the world. Oh, those neglected opportunities; it is tragic to think what losses we are suffering *now* because of the slothfulness and misdirected activities of so many comrades. Yet if each comrade calls on only *two supporters per week* that means 100 invitations per present member per year, and a minimum recruitment of from 15 to 20 new members for each present member. What is wrong with many Parties and many persons in our ranks is that they know how to put the world upon its feet, but they won't make one single consistent effort to recruit other people for the job — but putting the world upon its feet isn't a single-handed job.

In this column we endeavour to take note of the principal matters of significance that happen as the months go by. And some of the present activities of the Party indicate a change of tendency and method that should be noted by our readers as a matter of some importance. Everyone knows that the Labour Party emerged and developed largely as an electoral instrument for implementing policies more or less developed previously or concurrently by the Trade Union and Socialist Movements. Policies were adopted rather than created. Recent years have seen a change, which has become more and more marked. Last year membership and policy conferences were organised, and as we pointed out at the time, so eager was the rank and file to discuss policy that the membership discussions and the campaign dependent thereon suffered. There followed Labour's new and re-announced policies circulated to the movement and an annual conference largely devoted to their discussion. Never was there in our Party such concentration and intelligent examination of social and economic problems. Now this is followed up by many local

Educational Conferences regarding the policies already more or less crystallised, and study courses for further intensive examination of the same and other problems. We venture to point out to our readers the implicit importance of all these things. The Labour Party is becoming a self-catering and self-contained instrument of democracy (all the more reason that the ranks should be recruited) *and it is getting ready*. The responsibilities will be here soon enough. We shall want that educated and understanding people.

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LOCAL ELECTIONS (PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION) BILL.

Our readers will be interested to learn that a Bill has been introduced into the House of Commons for the purpose of introducing Proportional Representation in Local Elections. We have a profound suspicion and distaste for this Bill, and would warn our readers to be on their guard against any endeavours to popularise a measure such as is now proposed. Fortunately, the Bill does not appear likely to get any further in the present session of Parliament, and we do not, therefore, propose to print the text, but the following memorandum accompanying the Bill will be of interest.

The object of the Bill is to allow local authorities to adopt for their elections the system of proportional representation used in electing Members of Parliament for Universities under the Representation of the People Act, 1918.

The Bill proposes to allow local authorities in Great Britain, by a resolution of a three-fifths majority, to substitute for their existing system of election the method of proportional representation by the single transferable vote, so as to enable any considerable section of the electorate to return one member. Under the provisions of this Bill, elections will either be held triennially and apply to

the whole council, or, if a council prefers to retain the system of annual elections, it can make provision for this in the adopting resolution. In cases such as those of county councils where the electoral areas at present return only one or two members apiece, redistribution, or a rearrangement of the number of members returned, will be necessary, in order that the electoral areas may return three or more members. The Bill provides that any necessary redistribution is to be made by order of the Home Secretary after consultation with the local authority. In municipal boroughs and urban districts redistribution will not, as a rule, be necessary if triennial elections are adopted, as the existing wards return several members.

Casual vacancies will, in the event of a contest, be filled by an election held by the method of the single transferable vote.

It is also proposed that the members of local authorities who adopt the Act shall elect their aldermen by the proportional system.

Authorities which adopt the Act may revert to the present system if after six years' experience they are not satisfied with the change.

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REDDIFORD v. BECKETT.

Mr. John Beckett, former M.P. for Peckham, and now the I.L.P. Secessionist Candidate, apparently has a flair for getting into serious difficulties with his agents. Mr. Beckett himself was at one time a Labour Agent.

In the most recent of these escapades Mr. Beckett found himself in the Lambeth County Court facing an action by Mr. Reddiford for salary in lieu of notice. The Agents' Union were not concerned in this matter, and Mr. Reddiford has not been a member of the Union.

From a report of the case, we note that Mr. Beckett's defence originally consisted of serious charges against the agent. It appears, however, that the case was settled on Mr. Beckett unreservedly withdrawing all the allegations made by him and paying into court the sum of £37 10s. 0d. and costs.

We pass no comment other than to observe that the onlooker sees most of the game.

Anyway, we have no doubt that Mr. Lewis Silkin, the official Labour candidate for Peckham, will clean up the politics of this area in due course, and be returned triumphantly to Parliament.



Our readers will, with us, be interested to note that Mr. J. S. Middleton, the Assistant Secretary of the Labour Party, completes, at the beginning of October, this year, thirty years' service with the Party. The period falls in the Conference week, and we hope and believe Jim Middleton's unique and unselfish services will there receive their merited publicity.

Labour's "Wayside Message" (published by the Labour Party) is now printed in a newer and more effective form. Good propaganda this — and cheap.

Mr. Sam Hague, J.P., who retired from the agency in the Bilston Division some months ago, has now moved to Blackpool—present address: 50, Sherborne Road, Blackpool.

Mr. Hague's retirement and election as an Honorary Member of the Agents' Union creates a vacancy in the Presidency, and the President-Elect, Councillor W. Barefoot, J.P., steps into the vacant post. Bravo! to the old President, and a bow to the new one.

The address of Councillor Claude Denscombe, Labour Agent at Wallsend, now is 31, Sycamore Street, Wallsend-on-Tyne.

The Collectors' Books, advertised in another part of this issue, have been enthusiastically taken up throughout the country. One constituency ordered two hundred books.

One customer (from Glasgow at that!) sent twopence for a sample book but in coin! Imagine the Editor paying sixpence overcharge on the letter to recover the twopence that was within. Readers please note that coin sent in unregistered letters is liable to be surcharged double registration fee. Our Glasgow friend is a beginner and the right sort. He paid up.

We have received a copy of the "North-East Kent Chronicle," a really bright paper, and one of the series issued throughout the Co-operative Party. This month's free distribution is 11,600 copies. Official organ of the Faversham D.L.P.

We have also received a copy of the "Reading Citizen," a diversified eight-page penny monthly published by the Reading Labour Party. A readable, forceful and informative paper.

Coventry Labour Party apportion the income from individual membership as follows:— 12½ per cent. *each* to Ward and Women Sections, 25 per cent. to collectors and 50 per cent. to the Divisional Party. Special endeavours are being made this year to increase and consolidate the membership.

"How to Use the 'Labour Woman'," by Margaret Gibb, North-East Woman Organiser, is the title of a leaflet containing some excellent advice and suggestions for Women's Sections, which has been reprinted from the "Labour Woman" and circulated.

The North-East Camberwell Labour Party Agent, Mr. J. H. Round, 46, Church Street, S.E.5., has issued a telling leaflet explaining what the Party is; what it does; how it does it; and what the supporter can do. A membership application is attached. Income from members' contributions last year was £165 15s. 4d.

"Methods of Social Study," by Sidney and Beatrice Webb, price 8s. 6d. nett, is a new book containing a plethora of useful hints for the social student. What can be found in documents and minutes; what to observe in the working of committees; note-taking; watching the institution at work; the use of statistics; are a few pointers taken at random showing the scope of this work.

The Greenwich Labour Party issued 2,700 cards to members in 1932. For this go-ahead Party we have set an easy task in the competition connected with the sale of our Collectors' Books (see advertisement). Ward contributions to the D.L.P last year reached a total of £304 2s. 4d.

The Clitheroe D.L.P. notwithstanding the difficulties in their area during the past year secured £94 12s. 10d. from members' subscriptions. What about doubling this sum this year?

The Brecon and Radnor D.L.P. have arranged a series of Conferences (not one only) in the Division in connection with the Membership Campaign. This Division comprises two whole Counties.

The Pontypridd D.L.P. supplied delegates to the Annual Meeting with several pages of blank paper for notes. They needed it! The proceedings lasted nearly seven hours, and the interest which delegates showed was remarkable.

Councillor W. H. Oldfield, J.P., Labour Agent, Gorton, writes: — "Your paper is valued greatly by our officials." The Gorton United Trades and Labour Council has already issued a thousand cards this year and hold another five hundred which are going out. Gorton intends to double last year's membership.

The Acton Ward Section of the Shoreditch Labour Party are a live lot. The ward has a balance in hand of £74 9s. 6½d. and collected £78 3s. 6d. last year in members' subscriptions. Members receive a monthly bulletin of local activities, and under practically every heading the Annual Report indicates progress and activity.

A message to the Editor from one of the oldest serving Party agents: "The Lord bless your soul, Drinkwater, the Lord bless your soul." We duly feel the uplift. Deep answers deep!

Dudley Labour Party (Agent Mr. H.

Chambers), is doing well. Literature sales and membership will both show a record this year, and converts are being made daily. Membership cards applied for 1,600. A feature of the work is the impression made by the candidate at monthly lectures in the wards. In some cases the attendance is one hundred at each lecture.

The Rt. Hon. Herbert Morrison, J.P., who, till his appointment as Transport Minister, was the leader of the Labour Party on the L.C.C., has again been selected for that post on the retirement of Mr. Lewis Silkin.

Our acknowledgment to the "Glasgow Forward" for a kind notice of our collectors' books, which has resulted in many enquiries and orders. "Forward" says "these are excellent books."

Mr. H. Rowbottom, Secretary, Royton and Shaw Trades Council and Labour Party, writes: "I may say that I find the *Organiser* very useful and a storehouse of information to me in my work as Secretary. I look forward to each issue with its elucidation of problems and its suggestions."

(Concluded from page 56.)

to guarantee the peacefulness of the change. He, however, urges that the decisive blow to capitalism must be struck while the people's mandate is fresh and strong. It will be delivered constitutionally, and if unconstitutional means are used to resist it, those who use such methods must not complain if they are met with force. Notwithstanding these expressions, Sir Stafford Cripps obviously believes that constitutional methods can succeed, and may succeed, if there is a sufficient volume of Socialist thought behind them.

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How To Keep Members

AN IMPORTANT ARTICLE ON A PRESENT PROBLEM.

Many Parties have told us from time to time that their problem is not always that of how to make members, but that of holding them when obtained. We take this statement in some cases with the necessary grain of salt because the membership has not always been first built up, and, unfortunately, there are friends who hesitate too long on the brink and are disposed to exaggerate difficulties and dangers without trying to overcome them. At the same time, there is real need for special attention to the problem of retaining members, hence this article. Our Party is largely in the experimental stage regarding the building and holding of a great membership; special attention to this problem is, therefore, all the more desirable.

Ours is a Special Problem.

In the first place, if the Labour Party is to become a great collecting agency (and by this we do not mean that our machine must degenerate into a collecting machine—that problem we shall deal with presently) one must recognise at once the differences between us and other agencies or enterprises which depend upon weekly or regular collections. The landlord, for instance, has an entirely different problem. All the might of the law is behind him in enforcing his demand. Weekly debt collectors have the same force behind them more or less, and what they collect is, of course, money for value received—also more or less. The insurance companies, whose success is in some respects a pattern to us, have a slightly different problem. Much of their collections in the early years of the life of a policy presents problems similar to ours, but in the main insurance companies and societies collect on a moral compulsion, because of the loss entailed when members lapse. Friendly societies and trade unions are also on a different plane for each of these give specific value for money, and loss is entailed on the member when the member lapses. The nearest approach to the problem of the Labour Party is that of membership of the Methodist Churches where class leaders collect the penny membership fees.

The building up, therefore, of a great voluntary paying membership for political purposes presents pro-

blems that are in the main entirely new. But advice that can be given upon this subject is, fortunately, not altogether theoretical, and there can be no doubt to-day of the feasibility of the plan the Party has in view. In many constituencies great memberships *have* been built up and held for several years. And these memberships are increasing. The problems, therefore, have been locally solved. They are certainly solvable.

Many Parties Have Solved It.

We mentioned last month a constituency which had increased its membership income by £191 last year, and the membership now totalled 5,000. We mentioned another constituency, which had increased its membership by over 500, making a total of 3,327. We can present a long list of constituencies of memberships exceeding or approaching the latter figure, where the membership has every appearance of solidity and permanency. We believe that more difficulties surround the building and retaining of the first thousand members than occur afterwards, for the simple reason, as has been proved, that membership in a sense is "catching," and that example plays a tremendous part in making the habit which we desire the people to form, i.e., that of regularly paying their weekly contribution to the Party.

Leaving aside now the question of how to get members, one must concentrate on destroying the lingering notion of some of our old comrades that "the Party" as represented by the active workers, and the membership are virtually two distinct things, involving a situation which means that "the Party" has to cater for, collect from and handle, a new problem, and almost another body. It is just here that our problem differs from that of the insurance companies. In these, the members do not, and are not expected to function. They appear in the picture merely as payers of contributions. In our case the exact opposite is the case. What one really has to do is to see that membership carries itself; not that "God's elect," or the older members of the Party are to carry some big new burden on their backs.

Much was said and written last year regarding bringing new members into the life of the Party. Much more could yet be said and written on this subject, because the lesson has not entirely been learnt. Even with big memberships, we still hear of shortage of collectors, of overworked officers and so forth. What has been done to harness the new members?

We do not believe that new members are likely to come along themselves and offer for service. A mere casual invitation from a collector will not bring members along either. We much prefer that each new member, and each present member, should have presented to them a definite list of Party activities, some of them quite simple and unobtrusive so that every member has the opportunity of volunteering for at least some trifling service.

Inviting New Members To Function.

This was a course we advocated a long time ago and in our issue for December, 1932, we printed an admirable form used by the Reading Labour Party for the purpose indicated. If our readers will look up this form they will note that sixteen alternative activities are enumerated, and we venture to suggest that only a minority of members given such a form will decide to do nothing at all. Certainly, if a list of activities like this is presented to every member from time to time, a large volume of voluntary service can result. The form indicated does not mention the office of collector, because we presume Reading already had sufficient collectors, but we advise the addition, because in most cases collectors must be secured, not from the original persons in the Party, but out of the ranks of incoming members. Incidentally we may repeat that Reading delivered three thousand of these forms to their members and 970 were returned containing no fewer than 4,850 promises for specified work.

Here, then, is the first great opportunity for picturing to members the vision we desire them to imbibe of an active live movement, unitedly working and moving towards its goal. But matters must not be left here. These activities must be made use of, not allowed to lie unanalysed and unseen in Party offices or secretaries' homes.

It will be found that many members' offers are for unobtrusive service. They will not want to attend ward

meetings, but those who will, should be given the opportunity, and if a membership campaign has just resulted in some large new addition to the membership, it is worth while arranging a social evening in conjunction with the ward meeting. This promotes that feeling of warmth and comradeship which is so essential in this matter.

In other cases where members are coming in gradually but steadily, new members ought to be given a specially warm and personal invitation to meetings, and the person responsible for their introduction should not neglect (nor overdo) the little necessary nursing which is sometimes desirable.

Dealing With Collectors.

Of the problems of collecting, one could write pages, but the essential thing is that collectors should be called together and given definite instructions and advice. Especially should it be urged upon them that the work of collecting should be regularly done, and inability to collect should be immediately notified to some central officer. Collectors should never be given very many members to collect from if the system is that of voluntary collectorship, and if it is that of paid collectorship paid collectors should not be burdened with offices which interfere with their doing the work for which they are paid.

The use of the collectors' books, advertised on another page, tends to regularise the whole question of collecting. Instructions are here given, and the work of book-keeping simplified. This is essential, and collectors ought to have their books supplied to them ready written up. This means that other volunteers in the Party should be prepared to attend at a suitable place some night for writing-up purposes. We get plenty of volunteers for this work at election times—it is just as necessary in between elections.

If our advice is followed regarding giving opportunities to members to function, there will be no shortage of collectors. And it is imperative that there should always be a proportion of collectors who have no special rounds of their own, but who will be prepared to step into the place of those who notify that they are unable in any week, or at any time to do their own rounds.

It will always be found time to time that some members fall into arrears,

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2. Claimants during 1933 must provide such reasonable evidence of the genuineness of the membership and increase as the Editor may require.

3. Claims by D.L.P.s will be confirmed by reference to Labour Headquarters.

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or notify that they do not wish to continue. It is just here that a little-thought-of, and rarely-appointed, but most necessary official should step in. We profoundly believe that membership visitors should be appointed by every Party. And these people are not to be of the bummer type, nor is it their function merely to keep members up to a financial performance. Membership visitors should be appointed to visit any member seen to be falling behind in payments, or in interest in Party work, and the visitor will require to use considerable tact in the methods of approach. The visitor can be made the medium for handing in an invitation card to some special function or other, for giving an appropriate pamphlet, or even the *Daily Herald*, the *New Clarion* or some other suitable publication; the object of the visit is to re-excite the member's interest. Incidentally, if it is found that poor circumstances are at the bottom of the lapse, it is obvious that the visitor should be capable of dealing with the situation by excusing contributions. In some cases it may be found even necessary to change the collector for reasons that certainly will occur from time to time.

Members MUST Be Fed—Educationally.

We have remarked that our machine must not degenerate into a collecting machine. Rather should we utilise our new system of collecting to spread propaganda and to dovetail it in with other organisational methods. Membership will not be held permanently if collectors are merely collectors. They must be made the medium for occasional distributions of literature.

For a long time we have advocated in every Party we have visited, and which does possess a local journal of its own, the distribution of the Labour Party *Citizen* regularly among members. The cost per member is trifling, but the return where this experiment has been tried is simply wonderful. Collectors themselves feel less delicacy in collecting contributions when they are able to hand in this little leaflet every few weeks. The members too feel that they are getting something tangible for their money. It will prove, we believe, exceedingly difficult to maintain large memberships and good collections merely on the evidence we are able to

produce from time to time that the money goes in Parliamentary and local political activities. The distribution of the *Citizen* dovetails in the fulfilling of a very natural desire and the sowing of good propaganda seed. The results are to be seen in many directions.

We believe also that members of the Party have special moral rights at propaganda meetings, even at social functions. A big speaker comes down to a function, and the Executive is tempted to sell all the best seats, so that members desirous of hearing one of the leaders of the Movement must either buy a ticket or take a back seat. The idea has been tried of distributing among members of the Party tickets which entitle them to specially reserved seats at certain big meetings. This is a plan to be commended. Its effect is to satisfy members and to give them a special inducement to hear speeches which further confirm their faith; in every way it aids organisation.

Local Parties must realise that if membership falls away cause and effect are the same, i.e., it is because the membership is not functioning. More invitations to meetings will not cure this evil nor even more concentration on collecting. That plan of seeking to get the stickers *to do something* and of giving them a selection of what they can do, is the best cure and gives the healthiest result. While we are trying to increase the ratio of members to Labour voters let us not forget that success in this matter depends largely on our success in getting a satisfactory ratio of volunteer workers to members.

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QUESTIONS ANSWERED HERE

Against P.R.

Question: I have noticed that they are now trying to introduce Proportional Representation in Local Government Elections. I believe there was a book published a year or two ago exposing P.R. and should be glad if you could let me know where I can get the book?

Answer: The book to which our correspondent refers is doubtless that by Mr. George Horwill, a former Labour Parliamentary candidate. Its title is "Proportional Representation: Its Dangers and Defects." Publishers, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 40, Museum Street, W.C.1.

The Fabian Society also issued a Tract, No. 211, "The Case Against Proportional Representation," by Herman Finer, D.Sc. (Econ.), London. We cannot say whether either or both of these publications are still in print.

Those Free Registers Again.

Question: Can you give us any information concerning the issue of the register of electors? Is the Local Labour Party entitled to receive a copy of each new register? No new ones have been issued to us since the 1931 election, and the only answer we receive when we ask questions at our Central Party meetings is that the Party is only entitled to one copy at election times. Is this so, and is there no way of getting them except by buying them, which we believe is somewhat expensive? May I take the opportunity of saying how useful and interesting I find the *Labour Organiser*?

Answer: We are afraid it is not an easy matter to get free copies of the register. There exists some doubt as to whether at the last election the free copies given in most places to Parlia-

mentary Candidates were actually covered by regulation. A regulation did exist at one time which instructed R.O.'s to supply candidates with one free copy of the register at the time of election.

Our friends doubtless have in mind the fact that recognised political agents do receive free copies of the register. This is under definite regulation. The regulation provides for recognised political agents to be supplied with the *electors' lists*. The expiring register is, however, a part of the electors' lists, and in order to convenience political parties the register itself is supplied when published, and not held over till July when the rest of the electors' lists are published. The regulation provides for four copies of the electors' lists to be provided, but only two copies of the register. Local practice and the kindness of returning officers in some cases, extends this concession and three and four copies of the register are frequently supplied.

It will be seen that Local Parties do not come into the picture, nor do Divisional Parties who do not engage an agent.

So far as Divisional Parties are concerned the difficulty may be got over by nominating some person as the registration agent, and notifying the name to the returning officer. If, however, this is done merely for the purpose of getting registers, it is not only improper, but may lead to the present facilities being withdrawn. The moral of this is that Divisional Parties should definitely undertake registration work, whether they have an agent or no, and if they do this on an extended scale, there is a moral justification that they should be supplied with the electors' lists which their work helps to perfect.

A Parish Question.

Question: I would be much obliged to be informed on the following matter.

Three ratepayers have requested the Parish Council to convene a meeting to determine whether the provisions of the Lighting and Watching Act of parishes should be adopted. As this is the first step we would like to be clear if ratepayers only can attend this meeting and vote or if they can demand a poll. Also if all Local Government Voters can attend that meeting and vote, and if a poll is insisted on will the Local Government Voters have the power to vote. The old Act states ratepayers, but I wonder if any other lighting order has in any way altered the old Act or superseded it?

I will be much obliged for any information inasmuch as I find ratepayers' opposition is being organised against adoption.

Hence my anxiousness to be clear on the points raised.

Answer: The Lighting and Watching Act is one of the few adoptive Acts which may be adopted by a parish. The provisions of the Local Government Act, 1894, affecting this matter are very rarely called into play, and they are somewhat complicated. Where the adoption of the Act is proposed, a parish meeting is necessary, and of course all parochial electors are entitled to attend. The Act, however, provides for a majority consisting of two-thirds of the votes of the ratepayers present, in order to carry the adoption of the Act; but no indication is given in any regulations regarding the procedure at such a meeting. Any one parochial elector can, however, demand a poll, and if a poll is taken a two-third majority of the parochial electors is required. Here again, a curious provision occurs, because a clear majority of ratepayers is required to vote — not necessarily in favour. We trust our friends will be able to follow the position from this answer.

The Service Vote Problem.

Question: 124 nurses "living-in" at a local hospital have been granted Local Government votes on the grounds that their employer does not live on the premises. Does this qualification qualify 124 persons to a municipal vote?

They are all single young women and, of course pay no rates. They are visited at election times by gracious ladies wearing Tory colours, but of course they are not canvassing. Oh dear, no! Merely a friendly visit. When the Labour Candidate asks permission for a friendly visit it is refused.

The above qualification was obviously intended to cover caretakers and servants whose employers are living elsewhere. Surely it was not intended to give 124 municipal votes for a single premises?

Answer: The answer to this question depends upon the construction to be placed on Section 2 of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act, 1918, and the proviso thereto which reads:

Provided that—

(1) For the purposes of this section a person who inhabits any dwelling-house by virtue of any office, service or employment, shall if the dwelling-house is not inhabited by the person in whose service he or she is in such office, service or employment, be deemed to occupy the dwelling-house as a tenant.

It will be observed that the clause just quoted refers to a dwelling-house, and everything depends upon the interpretation of that word. It has been made clear that structural severance is not necessary, because "unless the context otherwise requires, the expression dwelling-house includes any part of a house where that part is occupied separately as a dwelling-house."

Reading the above words closely, it will be seen that there is nothing to prevent a single room becoming a dwelling-house, such as would confer the right of Local Government franchise. But everything depends upon the actual circumstances.

Cases have been decided where nurses in similar institutions, having a contract of service and occupying a bedroom, were held to be entitled to the Local Government Vote. In the particular case so decided, i.e., that of the nurses of Guy's Hospital, it was shown that the nurses could always have access to and go to their rooms, but in our opinion it is unfortunate that this matter has not been decided by a higher authority than that of the registration officer. We doubt very much, even if there is a separ-

ate bedroom for each nurse, whether this of itself constitutes the room as a dwelling-house, inasmuch as the probability is that meals are compulsorily taken elsewhere. In such case the bedroom is essentially a sleeping place only; residence lies jointly between the bedroom and the other rooms necessarily used. However, that decision stands until upset.

In other cases it has been shown that cubicles could not be regarded as dwelling-houses inasmuch as they were only sub-divisions of a room, and it would appear that to sustain a claim under the present provisions, a room must actually be self-contained. We are here up against the crux of this question. In a further communication our friend states his belief that in the case raised by him, the nurses have cubicles—not actual bedrooms. We incline to the belief that this is a case which it would be profitable to test by appeal to the County Court at the next revision.

Absence of Borough Councillor.

Question: One of our Borough Councillors has left the town, and it is now six months since he attended a meeting of the Council. Is there anything we can do to cause a by-election?

Answer: By Section 39 of the Municipal Corporations Act, 1882, it is provided that: "An Alderman or Councillor being continuously absent from the Borough for more than six months, he shall thereupon immediately become disqualified and shall cease to hold office. . . . In such event the Council shall forthwith de-

clare the office to be vacant and signify the same by notice signed by three members of the Council and countersigned by the Town Clerk and fixed on the Town Hall, and the office shall thereupon become vacant."

Our friends will note the procedure above outlined. It is for the Borough Council to take the initiative in declaring the office vacant, and after that two electors must notify the vacancy in order to set in motion the machinery for an election. Should the Borough Council fail to act the matter should be the subject of a motion by one of the Labour Councillors. If a Borough Council neglects to carry out the provisions of the law, it may be compelled to do so by mandamus.

Our answer does not apply to Metropolitan Borough Councils, or Urban District Councils. Section 46 of the Local Government Act, 1894, applies to these bodies, and here it is not a question of absence from the Borough, but absence from meetings. The provision is "if a member . . . is absent from meetings of the Council . . . for more than six months consecutively, except in case of illness, or for some reason approved by the Council . . . his office shall on the expiration of those months become vacant." It will be seen that under this provision illness is a sufficient excuse, or there may be some other reason of which the Council may approve. Further, in *Kershaw v. Shoreditch Borough Council* (1906) it was decided that the length of absence must be reckoned from the first meeting which the member failed to attend and not from the last meeting he attended.

Notes from an Agent's Desk

CO-ORDINATING LABOUR GROUPS. SOME METHODS OF "WARD-NURSING."

By JACK CUTTER.

One really noticeable gap in our Party organisation is the lack of any co-ordinating machinery for Labour Groups on local councils. An Association of Labour Groups or Group Leaders would be a very useful organisation and if some means of meeting the expenses of such an organisation could be devised its value to the movement would be considerable.

The expenses need not be unduly heavy—the secretary's expenses, postage, duplicating and the cost of an

annual conference—say about £75 a year—would cover the expenditure. It should not be an impossibility to find 75 local parties possessing efficient Labour Groups who would be willing to affiliate their groups at a fee of £1 per year.

Is there a real need for such a society? Regard the facts. No two Labour Groups administer Transitional Payments in the same way. Circular 1421 has almost as many applications as there are Education Authorities,

and in these days of Ministerial Circulars, Orders in Council and Departmental Regulations, Local Government is a hopeless muddle of varying scales and rules. When minority Labour Groups are forced by isolation to be content with securing as much as they can squeeze out of their reactionary majorities, and majority groups going as far as they dare to avoid their supersession by ministerial Mussolinis, there is no such thing as the voice of the Labour Movement in Local Government. There are two hundred voices, all shouting something different and this is not good for the Party. An Association such as I have suggested could co-ordinate these voices and form one policy for the country on each issue.

I do not for a moment suggest that the task of formulating general policy should be the job of the Association—that is for Annual Conference to decide; but obviously Annual Conference cannot deal with the day to day problems of local government.

For the modest expenditure I have suggested the Association's work would have to be done by correspondence and questionnaire. The ideal scheme would provide finances for an Executive Committee representative of each district, meeting at least quarterly, and would run a monthly organ. Such a scheme would cost £500 a year—which means a Head Office subsidy—which means "nothing doing" in these times.

However, there is the "Labour Bulletin" which could possibly allocate a certain space to the Association each month and I believe that, given the right man or woman for the secretary, such an organisation would at once justify its existence.

I would be interested to have your views on the matter.

* * *

Let's have a chat about this business of nursing wards. Wise Borough Labour Parties are now selecting or have selected their candidates for the November Municipal Elections so that they may have the whole summer and autumn to nurse the ward and capture the voters' imagination and confidence.

No one can lay down any set of detailed golden rules for nursing a ward. Not only do wards have differing "psychologies" (I use the word with reluctance, but we all know what it implies), but the politics of the parish

pump assume large importance and often one ward's meat is another ward's poison.

If the ward has a few funds in hand the monthly letter is good business. Commencing about March the candidate sends a letter each month to each house, working up interest in his candidature, stating Labour policy on local topical politics and generally giving an interesting angle on council affairs in a friendly sort of way. Cleanly duplicated in typescript with the candidate's own signature cut on the stencil, these letters are perhaps a little expensive, but worth a special effort as they make the canvassers' task easy and the candidate's name becomes a household word.

Another good plan, where there is a little money to spend on the candidature, is for the candidate to have printed sufficient postcards to distribute to each house in the ward bearing on the address side his name and address, and on one-half of the reverse side a note to say that he is at their service and if they are in difficulty or want any advice, to fill up the blank space (on the other half of the card) stating their difficulties and he will call and see them. This is a fairly cheap and effective method of gaining public confidence and has the added advantage of giving the candidate a good introductory sentence when he makes his preliminary call during the summer on his prospective constituents.

A ward grievance, such as the existence of a refuse tip that arouses local ire, the need of a playing field, branch library or swimming bath gives the candidate a chance to organise a petition, lead a deputation and make personal calls. Then, of course, there are the correspondence columns of the local press, which should be used only if the candidate has an instinct for interesting material, a good ward case consistent with group policy and can state his case well.

These methods are suggested only as additions to a vigorous advocacy of Socialist policy, concentration on ward organisation, a reliable canvass and a polling day organisation with no loose ends. Given these things during the campaign, the candidate and the ward committee might find something of value in the above suggestions to make the best use of the summer months.

I would be very glad to hear of any other and new ideas.

COUNCILLOR A. JAMES, J.P.

Secretary and Agent, Miles Platting Divisional Labour Party.



For over twenty years Agent in the Platting Division and a worker in the Movement for many years more, we tender our heartiest appreciation and our readers' congratulations to Councillor Alfred James, J.P., whose name is a household word in Manchester.

Mr. James was the first Secretary of the National Association of Labour Registration and Election Agents, now the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents, and his interest in this organisation has never flagged.

Born on September 8th, 1869, at Plumstead, near Woolwich, of poor parents, so poor he says that they had to pawn the silver tea-pot—a wedding present — to pay the midwife's fees! What an entry into the world was there, my comrades! Mr. James can tell many interesting stories of his younger life. At seven years of age he helped his mother to make match boxes at twopence farthing per gross. He was very often so hungry as to eat the paste!

Somewhat later his father joined the capitalist class to become a "tobacco clay pine manufacturer," though every old-stager knows that the "manufac-

turer" would be merely a home worker in another sweated industry. Where are the clay pipe manufacturers to-day?

Mr. James received an elementary school education, supplemented at a later age by evening classes at the City of London College, Moorfields, in Latin, Greek and Divinity. It is interesting to note that Alf. James once had aspirations for the church. He has preached in workhouses, and it was his experiences among the inhabitants of common lodging houses and such places which turned him to Socialism. Mr. James, however, still addresses P.S.A's, Brotherhoods, etc., but this we do not record to his disparagement.

In the early years of the present century, Mr. James came under the influence of George Lansbury, "my godfather in the Faith," as he calls him, and he joined the I.L.P. He was the Party whip for some time on the Poplar Council and as Chairman of the Public Health Committee received a fine municipal education. Mr. James was appointed agent to the old North-East Manchester Division, now Platting Division, on June 15th, 1912, and that post he holds to-day.

Elected to the Manchester Borough of Guardians, 1915, and to the Manchester City Council in 1919, he has held the seat ever since with majorities between 970 and 2,500. He has been a member of the War Pensions Committee since its formation; Chairman of the Cleansing Committee and is at present Chairman of the Sanitary Sub-Committee.

Alf. James hates platform work (as a good agent should) and only does it under compulsion. He believes the agent's job is to do the work of organising, and leave the "gassing" to others. He was appointed a J.P. in 1928.

Members of the National Union of Labour Organisers and Election Agents will be interested to know that the first meeting of the old Association was held in Mr. James' Office at 2a, Enoch Street, Miles Platting, and that at this meeting Mr. G. R. Shepherd, present National Agent, became the first chairman.

Genial, cheery and in all things sincere, Alf. James carries the good wishes of all his colleagues for many years' service yet.

Literature for Present Sale

"Workless — A Social Tragedy." Price one penny. The National Joint Council, Transport House, Smith Square, S.W.1.

Let us see: How long is it since Hardie, Burns and the rest first sought to arouse the national conscience to the problem of the unemployed? And here to-day we have the problem, surging up as the greatest social evil of our time, the cancer that portends the end of capitalism as surely as night follows the day.

In the pages of this pamphlet a lurid and accurate picture of the ravages of unemployment in civilised society is given. The pamphlet is issued as part of the national campaign under the joint auspices of the T.U.C., the Labour Party and the Co-operative Union, to secure a reversal of the present "economy" campaign. But the pamphlet prompts thoughts in its earlier pages, at any rate, far beyond that. While it indicates Labour's past endeavours and present immediate policy, and categorically expresses "National" failings and sabotage of work schemes, it also concentrates one's mind on terrific suffering. We must end this muddle, and in the only way.

"The World Muddle." Price two-pence, by W. N. Ewer and Francis Williams. The Labour Party.

The muddle we all see, but this pamphlet recalls the history of it and its causes. Not that the remedies the authors propose are heroic; there is much support for them outside Labour ranks. The pamphlet does not attempt to give a visionary or impracticable notion of Socialist states coming together to solve the problems stated, but it indicates steps, necessary and urgent, we agree, that should be taken now, under existing conditions, to straighten out industrial trade relations and finances, and these suggestions must not be dismissed with a gesture because we are Socialists. Here are practical proposals and the authors rightly aver that for other fundamental problems far more radical changes are needed. So say we, but this minimum for international recovery

calls for our understanding and support.

"The Right to Live" — A T.U.C. defence of the claims of the unemployed." Price threepence. Trades Union Congress, Smith Square, S.W.1.

This pamphlet is an authoritative and informative outline of the T.U.C. proposals regarding unemployment insurance and benefits. It is an essential publication for Labour speakers. The majority and minority reports of the Royal Commission are analysed and compared with the T.U.C. scheme.

Labour Party Study Circles.

Five Study Guides Now Ready.

- Guide No. 1 *Banking and Finance.*
- " " 2 *The Economic Situation.*
- " " 3 *The Socialisation of Industry.*
- " " 4 *The Land and Agriculture.*
- " " 5 *The Workers' Status in Industry.*

(All at twopence—The Labour Party).

The most striking recent feature in Labour Party activity is the encouragement given to the intensive study of present-day social and economic problems through the urge to establish study circles and the provision of suitable guides in pamphlet form for them. This enterprise of the Labour Party is a recognition of the need for expert knowledge on those questions among the rank and file, and of the desirability of building a movement which knows and understands besides merely believing or blindly following a lead given to them.

The intention is that study circles should be formed throughout the movement, and the pamphlets now published are intended as a guide to the studies undertaken. Each subject forms a special study and a "circle" may decide upon one, more, or all of the subjects taking them consecutively or concurrently on separate evenings.

What is a study circle? Quoting from the pamphlets it is as follows:—

"A Study Circle is a group of people who meet together regularly to learn more about a particular subject.

"It may consist of half-a-dozen people, or it may be as large as thirty. It may hold six meetings, or as many as are necessary to cover the subject fully. It is important that the Circle should meet regularly whilst it is in existence.

"It will be seen that a Circle can be adapted to meet the needs of any group of people; and at its first meeting it should make its own arrangements as regards time and place and day of meeting so as to secure the maximum convenience for all.

"A Study Circle may have a leader who, at each meeting, explains some aspect of the subject under discussion. Where a leader is not available for a whole course, each member in turn should 'lead' the Circle.

"After the exposition of the subject-matter of the evening, time should be allowed for questions and discussion, which are often the most valuable part of the meeting.

"When a Study Circle has covered its syllabus, at least some of the members should be in a position to act as leaders of other Study Circles on the same subject.

"When there are two or more Study Circles in the same town, joint meetings or debates on particular topics will prove to be stimulating and valuable."

We are particularly pleased to note the catholicity of choice given in the various bibliographies which are to be found at the end of the first four guides. But now we want

LOCAL LABOUR PARTY LIBRARIES.

The Editor of the *Labour Organiser* has assisted to set up libraries for local Parties in some places. Who follows?

Socialist League Pamphlets.

We have to hand seven instructive, constructive and thoughtful pamphlets issued by the Socialist League. Each one is critically analytical of the problems dealt with, and is an important contribution to present-day discussions. The pamphlets are uniformly and attractively covered, but from the point of the literature seller it would have been better to have varied the covers.

"*The Challenge to Capitalism.*" Price twopence. By the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Trevelyan.

Trevelyan's pamphlet is largely a statement of the position the Labour

Party is urged to take up in relation to a frontal attack on capitalism. The author says, "A better society or greater security for the mass of men and women is absolutely impossible under the present order . . . a few years hence there will certainly be a flood of opinion rising to demand great changes . . . our Party can, while they are almost helpless to create such a revolutionary force, provide the channel down which it can flow." The writer hopes the Labour Party will have long enough vision to prepare for this emergency, and to provide a policy and an organisation for it, knowing what measures to take and having the courage to take them.

"*The Need for a Socialist Programme.*" Price threepence. By G. D. H. Cole and G. R. Mitchison.

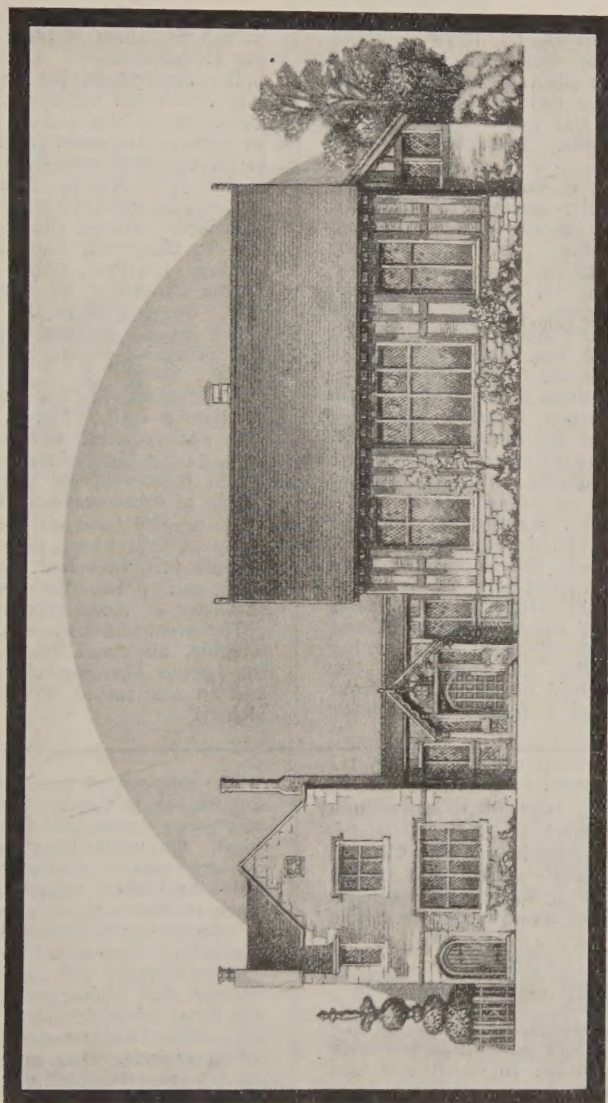
Not at all unexpectedly, this pamphlet exposes the impossibilities of gradualism. It advises that the time of a Labour Parliament should be reserved as far as possible for major measures of constructive Socialism. "Stiff resistance will have to be offered to those groups which press for the speedy enactment of even the most desirable social reforms, unless those reforms are of a sort to make a real and immediate contribution to the fundamental work of Socialist construction."

"*The Labour Party and the Constitution.*" Price sixpence. By Harold J. Laski.

One of the best and most weighty of the series. The pamphlet deals with many problems we might shortly have to face, and suggests that our constitution is to be tested by stresses and strains more profound than any to which it has been subjected since the seventeenth century. One must not read what the other authors say without also studying Laski's calm review of the obstacles that must, and which he apparently believes will be, overcome.

"*Banking.*" Price sixpence. By G. R. Mitchison.

A contribution to the subject from an original angle. There are times when we have regretted some lawyers in the Labour Movement; but the rats deserted in 1931, and those who are left show quality. The draughtsmanship of certain proposed Acts to be found in this pamphlet is obviously
(Please turn to page 56.)



SALOPIANS' NEW HOME.

We illustrate above what must be the noblest and finest building to be used as a centre by any Local Labour Party in the country. Shrewsbury possesses many historic buildings and in keeping with these, and on the site of an historic mansion, whose timbers have been incorporated in the new building, Mr. J. K. Morris, an old and

valued member of the Shrewsbury Party, has recently erected the above building, known as Bellstone Hall. By the generosity of Mr. Morris, an office for the Party has been found in the premises, and the magnificent hall seen on the right of the photograph, is at the disposal of the Party for their own use or for letting on four nights of the week.

Bellstone Lane, in which the hall is situated, derives its name from a glacial boulder found in immemorial times on the site, and which for hundreds of years was a public landmark, and used in one way and another for public purposes. The boulder is still preserved.

The whole of the building and the hall has been erected in exquisite taste, and by the employment of front-rank craftsmen. The main building is "dated" in the Tudor style. The wing seen on the left of the photograph represents a rather later type of architecture and presents to the onlooker the impression of a later addition to an old building.

The base of the building is on stone from the former mansion occupying the site, and the timbers — for the whole building is timbered and panelled in the style of the period—now again worked with, we would suppose, infinite labour, are probably six hundred years old. The decorations throughout, iron work, fireplaces, etc., have been made in strict accord with period ideas, and the whole building has a classic charm which suggests to one at once that the Socialist whose genius and generosity has prompted the building received his inspiration from the Morris of a former age, whose

name and work prompted so much of British Socialism in the early days of our Movement.

The opening of the Bellstone Hall was celebrated on 2nd March by a gathering of the Labour clans from all parts of the county, who sat down to an excellent supper, also provided by Mr. J. K. Morris. The supper was followed by speeches and a programme of songs. Among the speakers were: Mr. T. Hardwick, Labour Candidate, Ludlow Division; Mr. E. Porter, Labour Candidate, Shrewsbury, 1931; Mrs. Porter, Mr. H. Drinkwater, Editor of the *Labour Organiser*, and Mr. Sturgess, of the Wrekin Labour Party.

Responding to the toast of the "Bellstone Hall," Mr. J. K. Morris, who was received with musical honours, gave a highly interesting account of the history of the site and of the details of construction of the building.

Those who look on the County of Salop as a backward area would have thought otherwise had they been present and noted the numbers and character of those present.

The event above recorded marks, we imagine, an epoch in the history of the Labour Movement in this County, and in the future it will march to victory.

(Continued from page 54.)

the work of a legal mind, and a master of the subject, while the matter-in-chief of the pamphlet does credit to the writer as an author, and to his knowledge of a subject he may one day be called upon to handle as he suggests.

"The Break with Imperialism." Price twopence. By J. F. Horrabin.

An acknowledged authority on the subject on which he writes, Horrabin treats of a matter to which sufficient thought has not been given by our Movement. What is to be our attitude to the Empire, to "subject races," and to the others? The writer says we must accept the responsibilities which capitalism has left us in those parts of the Empire which it has exploited, and, as Socialist trustees, teach the people how to develop their own resources in co-operation with the outside world.

"The Claim of the Unemployed." Price twopence. By William Mellor.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to suggest a minimum programme of emergency action for a Labour Government. The writer puts forward a plan by no means over-ambitious, and which he rightly regards as the minimum requirement of a serious effort to translate into immediate and effective action the slogan "Work or Maintenance." It will, of course, be thought that Mellor's suggestions are not those of which Cole and Mitchison were thinking and which they would exclude. The proposals are in most respects definite steps to Socialism.

"Can Socialism Come By Constitutional Methods?" Price twopence. By Sir Stafford Cripps, M.P.

The writer deals with a subject to which he is reputed to have given especial thought. It is interesting to note the writer's conclusion that, however carefully laid the plans of Socialists may be, it will be impossible:

(Please turn to page 41.)